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Engaging in SoTL through a Two-Year Program: Challenges, Success Factors, and Powerful Support Strategies

Theoretical framework

SoTL has the potential to advance the quality of teaching and learning in many ways (Hutchings et al. 2011). Yet, faculty engaging in SoTL may encounter several challenges (e.g., Dobbins 2011). **A better understanding of how to effectively support faculty may help to realize SoTL's full potential and may further promote SoTL at our institutions.** This poster contributes to the ongoing debate on how to create favorable conditions for faculty to engage in SoTL, and it aims to identify powerful strategies for supporting faculty members in their SoTL journey (Cornejo-Happel et al. 2020; Fanghanel et al. 2015; Gansemer-Topf et al. 2023; Kim et al. 2021; Myatt et al. 2018).

Context

The University of Amsterdam (UvA) is a research-intensive university spanning the arts, humanities, natural sciences, social sciences, and medical sciences. Its current ambition is to more effectively foster, recognize, and reward excellence in teaching.

SoTL is increasingly viewed as an institutional tool for strategically developing excellence. In 2021, the UvA set up *the Education Research Fellows program* to encourage faculty to engage in SoTL.

In the program's first cohort ($N = 18$), instructors with different disciplinary backgrounds and varying levels of experience participated.

Program goals

- Strengthen a **research-informed approach** to teaching and learning, and develop expertise to conduct systematic research on one's own teaching practice;
- Actively **share research findings** with colleagues within one's own faculty and beyond;
- Foster **community building** within the field of SoTL.

Program design

This two-year program supports participants as they set up and conduct their own SoTL project by offering:

- **Time:** 8 hours per week to dedicate to their SoTL project;
- **Monthly meetings:** guest lectures, working sessions, and opportunities for peer feedback;
- **Individual coaching:** mentoring by an experienced educational researcher;
- **Visibility:** yearly symposium and budget to attend international conferences.

Research question: How can universities support faculty as they engage in SoTL?

- ❖ **What challenges** have faculty encountered while participating in the UvA SoTL program?
- ❖ **What aspects of the program** have positively contributed to the participants' progress and experience?

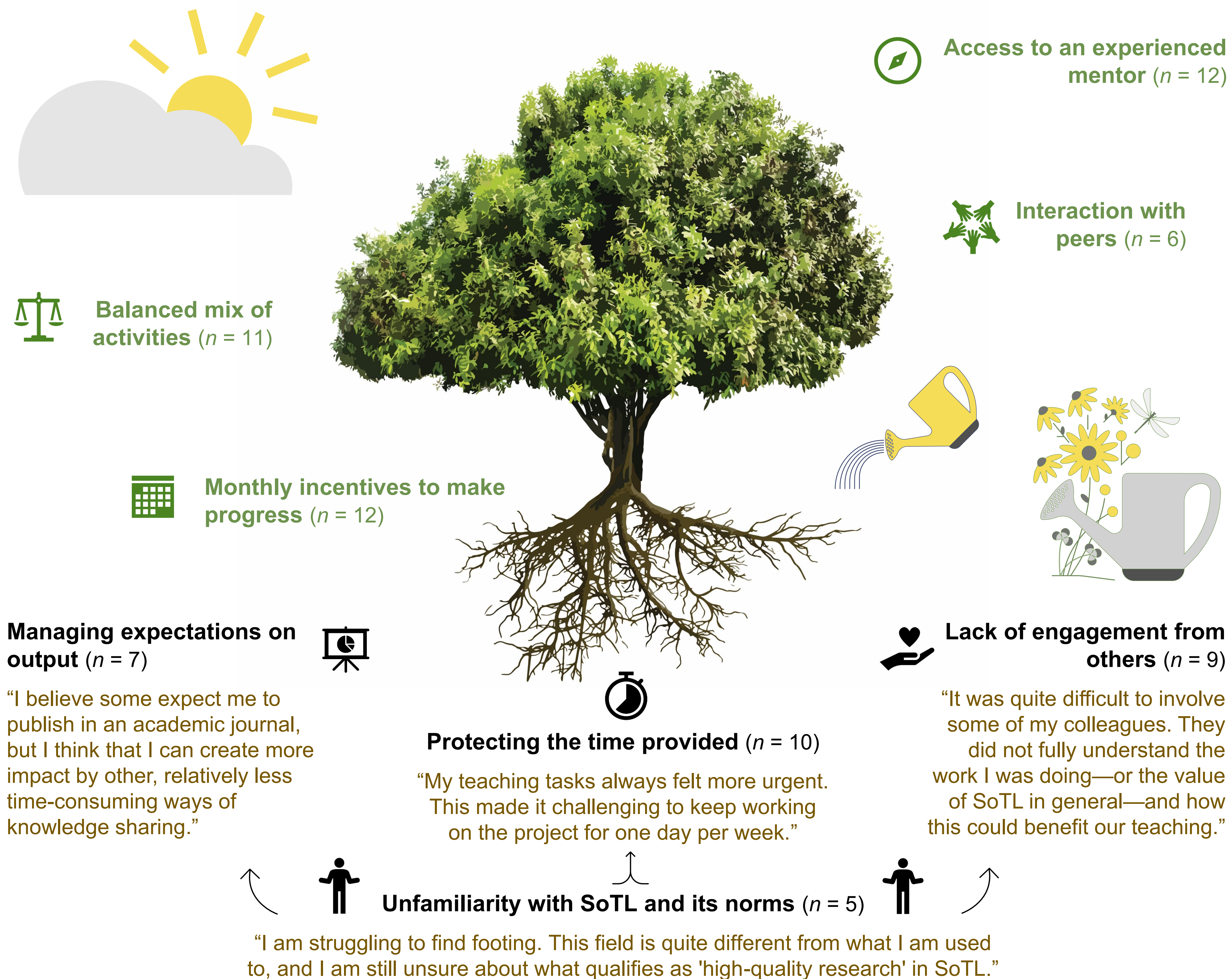
Method

Two rounds of **semi-structured interviews** with program participants from the first cohort ($n = 16$) halfway through and at the end of the program to explore how they experienced their SoTL journey through this program. Transcripts were **analyzed thematically** (Clarke et al. 2017).

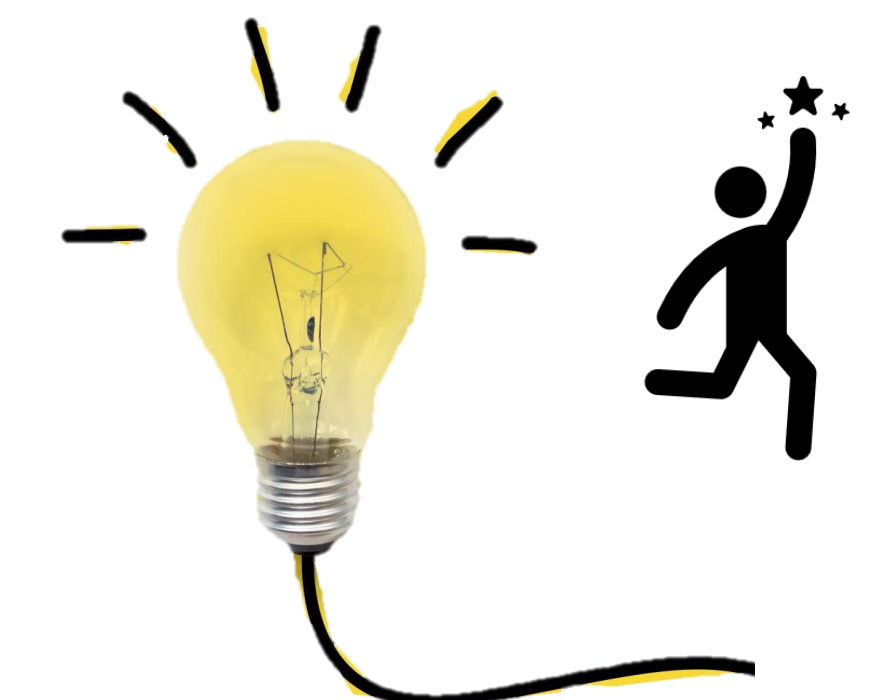
What works, what does not, and what lessons can be learned to better support SoTL?



Results: Challenges and success factors of the SoTL program



Lessons learned: Powerful support strategies



Key conclusions

- **Acquaint both program participants and their direct colleagues with the field of SoTL**—for example, by explicitly addressing what SoTL entails, its purposes, and what defines its quality—to reduce insecurity, better manage expectations, and create a common understanding of its added value;
- From beginning to end, encourage participants to actively **involve relevant stakeholders** in order to better embed their efforts in their departments.

Specific recommendations

- ✓ **Integrate individual support structures**, particularly through mentoring, **with a wide array of group activities** to cultivate a rich learning environment and advance the participants' progress;
- ✓ Offer **practical support** (guidance in applying for ethical approval, providing recommendations for journal or conferences, etc.) that helps participants adapt quickly to the field of SoTL and focus on key tasks;
- ✓ Consider facilitating a **physical working space** to help participants protect their time more effectively.

Further information

The FMG-UvA Ethics Review Board reviewed and approved this research in accordance with its guidelines (Project No. FMG-375).

Find the full abstract, reference list, and author biography on the Teaching & Learning Inquiry (TLI) website.

Scan the QR code to read more about the set-up of the UvA's Education Research Fellows Program and the participants' SoTL projects.



Acknowledgements

Special thanks go to Natalie Pareja Roblin, Daphne van Weijen, and Monique Volman.

This research was conducted at the University of Amsterdam's Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) and the Research Institute of Child Development and Education (RICDE).